

Empirical Evidence on Museums Relationships with Stakeholders

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In an environment highly filled with offers for spending free time and in order to reach its target audience, in order to send its message and to diversify its financing sources, each museum has a longer or shorter list of partners (friends, supporters, sponsors, donors). Regardless of their name: authorities, sponsors, donors, friends, visitors, staff, all of these entities are an integral part of the rich and diverse category of a museum's stakeholders. As a community institution, the museum's duty is to keep a strong connection with its stakeholders aiming to achieve its own objectives as well as the stakeholders' expectations and requirements.

Keywords: stakeholders, community, audience, financing resources, multi-stakeholder-decision-making, partnerships.

1. Introduction

In an environment highly filled with offers for spending free time, in order to reach its target audience and in order to send its message and to diversify its financing sources, each museum has a longer or shorter list of partners (friends, supporters, sponsors, donors). Even though a long list of partners is considered to be a standard, a good practice model, few museums have developed a strategy to know their interests and to better manage the relations with them. Developing relations with a wide various range of partners and giving them the possibility to have an active role in the museum's strategy and in decision-making helps the museum to get through in a more complex society, having a competitive advantage (ELSORADY, 2018).

In the 21st century the traditional concept of museum (the simple depository of the patrimony) changes, or better, it enriches. The museum becomes an active institution which prioritizes various commitments towards a various range of community members (FILIPPOUPOLITI & SYLAIOU, 2015), it is a public utility institution with a strong educational purpose and with a role of social interaction (SCHETTINO, 2016), with a highly varied multicultural audience. The contemporary museum is summoned to become a supplier of inclusive, comprehensive and creative educational experiences, in order to offer everybody skills to live and equally participate in a society which embraces and promotes cultural diversity (FILIPPOUPOLITI & SYLAIOU, 2015).

In order to meet these new demands it is necessary to improve the activities and the services that the museum offers. Although, it remains a nonprofit organization, it shows more and more features of a commercial organization: the presence of stakeholders, strategies, complex evaluations, the need to bear various expenses from its own funds (education, research, recreation, marketing) as well as the continuous search of competitive advantages (ELSORADY, 2018) on a fearsome competitive market.

2. Theoretical aspects

Regardless of their name: authorities, sponsors, donors, friends, visitors, staff, all of these entities are an integral part of the rich and diverse category of a museum's stakeholders. As a community institution, the museum's duty is to keep a strong connection with its stakeholders aiming to achieve its own objectives as well as the stakeholders' expectations and requirements.

The term of stakeholder was introduced in the economic language by Edward Freeman in his work, in 1984 - *Strategic Management: a Stakeholder Approach*. Stakeholder, according to

FREEMAN (1984), defines any individual or group of persons which can impact or be affected by the actions of an organization or by achieving its objectives.

Another definition is given by SINCLAIR & HUTCHISON (1998) – any group or individual who feels that their interests are affected by the results of a decision-making process. The expressed interests are not only financially, but can cover a series of personal values like: the feeling of social justice, spiritual values and ecological principles.

The continuous knowledge and analysis of the stakeholders should not lack effective management, being the only possibility to assess their likely effect on the success of a joint action (projects, exhibitions, various communications).

MITCHELL (1997) helps us to understand the importance of advising with the members of a community who will be affected by a programme or project: the problems are defined in a more efficient way; the access to information which helps to understand things that are not found in technical and scientific analyzes; creating a feeling of belonging to the adopted plan or solution.

The benefits brought to the stakeholders' involvement in creating strategies, decision-making and in evaluating projects, are also confirmed by MONNIKHOF & ENELENBOS (2001), which summarize how stakeholders can be involved in four stages: identifying the demand (wishes, interests, criteria and the stakeholders' values); involving them in the process of identifying the solutions; negotiating – identifying the interests and adopting the strategy with the biggest number of "win-win" solutions and taking the decision (in consensus).

It should be mentioned that the involvement of all interested parties in the process of creating the strategies, the decisions and the evaluation of the results it is not only a necessity for the museum, but a wish of the community members, a tendency which grew significantly in the last years and is taking shape through direct participation and by recognizing their values and attitudes.

In literature there is a general acceptance that traditional management methods, characterized by decision-making by a small management team or even by a single man, based strictly on financial and technical considerations no longer fit with the contemporary realities through the inability to effectively manage the increasing number of problems and their complexity.

We can find a good example of making a consensual decision, at a community level in the Canadian expertise studied by SINCLAIR & HUTCHISON (1998) and it has the name of Multi-Stakeholder-Decision-Making (MSDM). MSDM is a process in which multiple interested parts are brought together in the early stage of resource planning and decision-making. Collaboration in decision-making, in a process that reflects the values and priorities of each stakeholder, is also seen by CLIFFORD (1994) as the most efficient to involve interested groups and the audience.

The main characteristics of MSDM emerged from the study led in Canada (SINCLAIR & HUTCHISON, 1998) are: bringing together the stakeholders and making a decision in consensus in an environment in which the institution and each stakeholder will supervise their own interests. In such process the museum is a participant in the decision-making process and not a "dictator" and it becomes an active stakeholder for its partners by recognizing the interests and values.

If the simple recognition of the stakeholders' importance can be a competitive advantage for a museum, applying the stakeholders' theory and maximizing the benefits offered by them will place them in a key position in making strategies for the museum ensuring the organization's success. This fact is supported also by the study results of ELSORADY (2008) on museums from Egypt.

Based on the research by HALCRO (2008) the stakeholders of a museum can be divided in three large categories: visitors, governing bodies and the community.

Increasing the visitors' inclusion and the role of various community groups in decision-making regarding the museum's programme are studied in today's literature (O'NEIL, 2006). The positive aspects of involvement through direct participation, implementing the decisions and

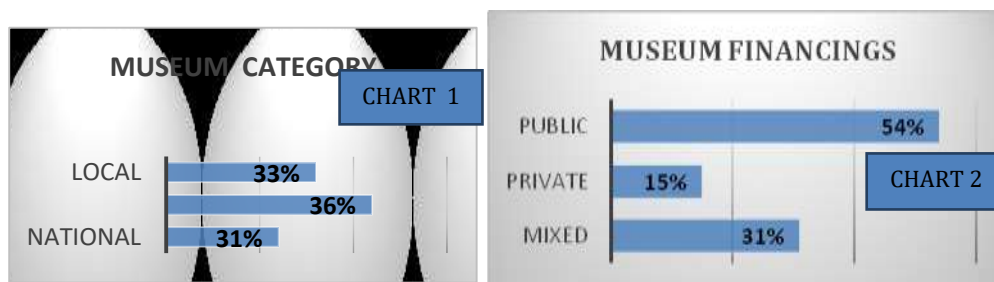
evaluating the results are emphasized in the study made in Australia by COGHLAN (2017). The culture of participating has the role of democratizing the experience lived in the museum (it launches discussions, it stimulates connections with active and potential communities), inside and also outside. Adopting a participating culture and a democratic practice in museums, where the museum becomes a participant which shares the decisional power with the visitors, allows the museum to go beyond its rhetoric in the official mission and becomes more democratic in practice and more relevant for the democratic society (COGHLAN, 2017).

3. Practical aspects

Based on the stakeholders theory, researches and studies issued in the last decades in the field of museum organizations, I devised a questionnaire with 20 items with Likert scale answers and 4 segmentation items for internal stakeholders of a museum (staff). The target audience was represented by museum employees from Romania: management, specialized and administrative personnel and the main purpose was to identify the perception of respondents about museum relations with stakeholders (internal and external). The main research method was a questionnaire, that was sent to a number of 300 museums and public collections and it was filled in by 100 persons of the major 3 segments: management, specialized and administrative. The questionnaire was sent to the participants through e-mail enclosed with a letter of intent and a privacy statement.

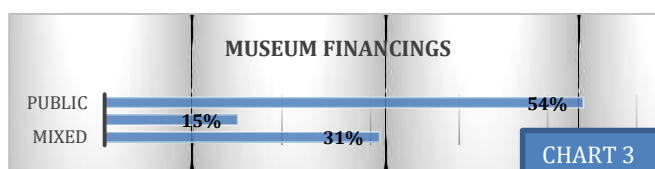
The distribution of results and preliminary conclusions

Regarding the distribution of the respondents, they are employed in local museums (33%), regional (36%) and national (31%) which give a good balance, a favourable representation within the study with almost equal segmentation of interest groups.



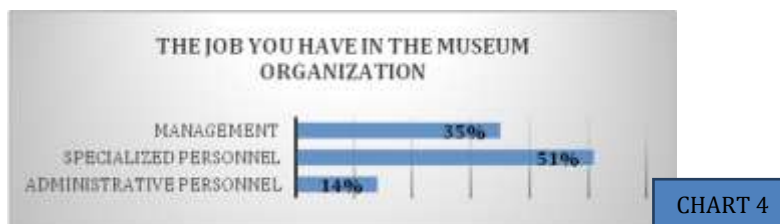
National museums are generally governed by the Ministry of Culture, regional ones by the county councils and local ones by town halls or entities and private persons (usually owners).

Regarding the type of financing (CHART 3) the public funding is the majority (53%), mixed (31%) and private (15%) – usually being private collections of local importance.



The results confirm the division of the museums participating in the study by the degree of importance. 15% belonging to the private area are most likely of local importance, belong and managed by founders – private persons and legal persons, monasteries, churches, various associations.

The respondents' structure is very close to a museum's internal structure: management (35%), specialized (51%) and administrative (14%) personnel. The share of specialized personnel (curators, conservators, researches, restorers) is gratifying, because this is the first segment to be actively involved in designing the museum's programmes and services.



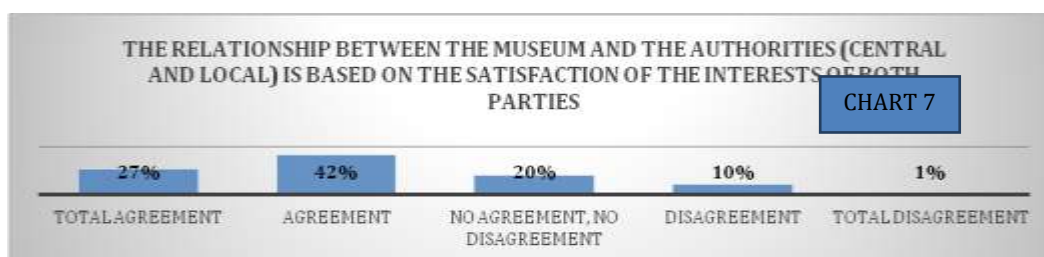
Regarding the accumulated service of the position we can see that the museum organization is generally a stable environment with an emphasis on personal development and with possibilities of advancement according to the professional accumulated service: over 3 years (76%), between 1-3 years (20%) and under 1 year (4%).



Results

The results of the questionnaire offer vital information regarding the existing partnerships between the museum and its stakeholders, the perception of those existent and the potential ones and to identify the real situation in Romania from the point of view of an important category of stakeholders – the museum staff.

The partnerships with governing authorities are based on satisfying mutual interests, 69% of respondents stating this thing and according to 72% of the registered answers the museums have autonomy over the managed funds.

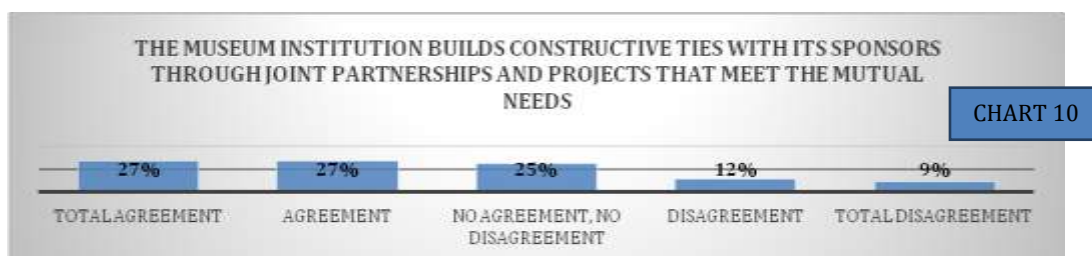


Even if there is a high level of autonomy and a good relation with the governing and financing authorities, although, the funds allocated to museums correspond to the current needs according to 63% of respondents. Actually there were increases in the last years. However, these were for salaries, utilities and minimum maintenance. The only examples of generous investments are in museums that have lost their head offices and are now in the process of building new head offices.

The level of underfunding should stimulate the attraction, every year, of new sponsors, but the results show that even though 63% of museums are deficient in investments, only 47% have as a concern signing new partnerships with sponsors and donors.



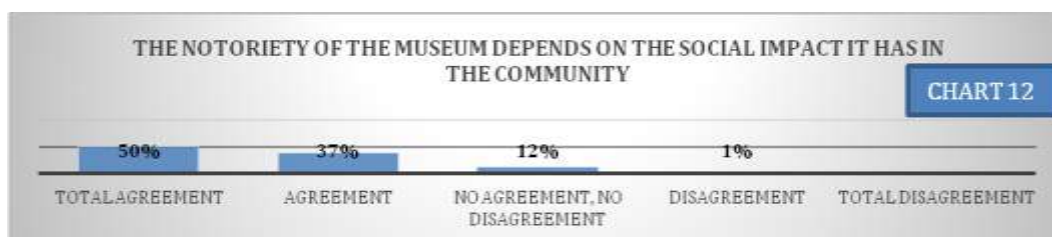
A good percentage (54% positive) was recorded for the constructive connections between the museum and its sponsors through partnerships and joint projects.



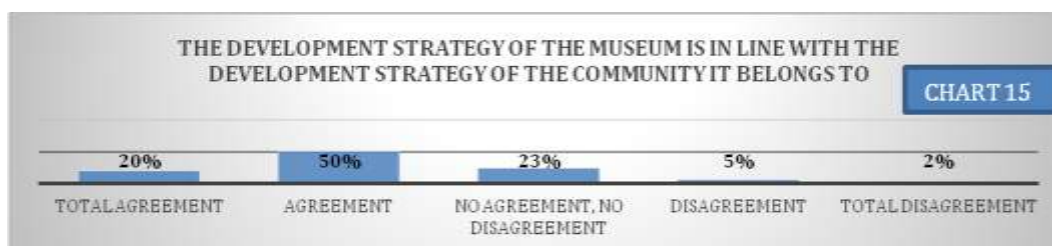
Most of the substantial partnerships from a financial point of view are paraphrased at a centre level, at national museums with high visibility (we remind the partnerships between *The National Museum of Art of Romania* and ORANGE – implementation of an audio guided system, *Bruckenthal National Museum* and Boromir, etc.). With a lower level of financing there are at regional and local level (*The Visual Art Museum of Galati* and *The Art Gallery, Museum of History, Culture and Christian Spirituality at the Lower Danube* and the Myosotis Pharmacies etc.)



An overwhelming part of the respondents agree that a greater share of own revenues is the key for a healthy development of the museums thereby, reducing dependence on funding authorities and improving services. But this wish, once applied, can have the desired effects only by changing the legislation. At the moment, at least for national museums, where the largest revenue from own funds is recorded, any additional input actually decreases the state's grant. On the other hand, private funding cannot become a universal remedy. Funds from private entities are influenced especially by the museum's location and its visibility. Thus, small museums or those from rural areas have difficulties in generating revenue from the private sector. It is an activity that consumes a lot of time and it is impractical for small museums that also have little staff.



The items that overlook the museums' relation with the stakeholders within the communities: the social impact plus value, active partnerships, development strategies, record positive answers between 70% and 87%. But it should be noted that this impact is provided by the members of the organizations that should initiate and manage these partnerships. A more realistic analysis could be given if we would have had answers from the representatives of communities which probably would look different or even total opposite.



The museum's staff, the employees from all working departments, are important stakeholders within the organization who usually are motivated and show devotion and develop a sense of belonging towards the projects and programmes in which they are involved.

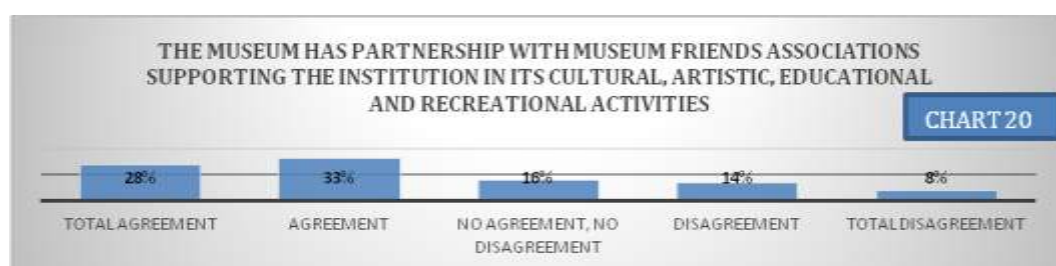




At first glance, 52% of respondents are involved in decision-making, but if we subtract the percentage of the management personnel (35%), who actually has attributions in decision-making we are left with only 17%. If from the total number of respondents we subtract those from the management sector, we are left with 65%, which means that only 11% from the specialized and administrative personnel is involved in decision-making. Regarding the training activities less than half benefit from such incentives.

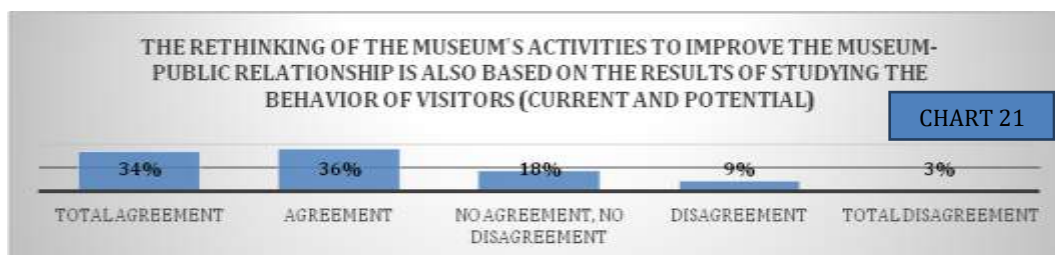


With regard to the involvement of the internal stakeholders (the staff) in the decision-making we have data that gives us hope for the item regarding the involvement benefits of persons outside the institution (external stakeholders): 47% agree, 35% are indifferent and 20% disagree. Thus, we draw the conclusion of a feeling of reluctance.



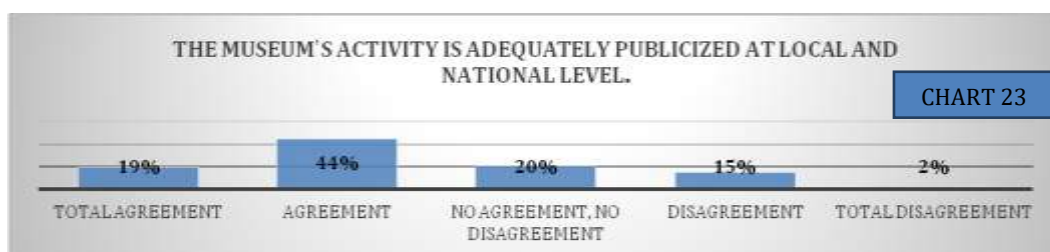
Partnerships with other local and national institutions are a necessity, the exchange of information, ideas, projects and experiences are beneficial for the organizational environment within the museums from Romania, stated by 87% of respondents. Regarding partnerships with other associations, organizations, groups, just over half, 51% experience such partnerships in this moment. A group of partners, from various fields of activities, is vital for the contemporary museum because it offers access to priceless resources. A good example of this kind of partnership in Romania is the *The Friends of The National Museum of Art of Romania Association*, a NGO founded in 1998 with the purpose of offering moral and financial support for The National Museum of Art of Romania. Among the major financed projects we recall: **Euroart** – ensuring good visiting conditions for people with locomotor disability; **Furniture for the European Art Gallery**; **Uniforms** for the art gallery's personnel; **Printing**

guides for more galleries; **Furniture and exhibition panels** at the *Museum of Art Collections*; **Humidity measuring equipment** in *Old Romanian Art Gallery*; **Heating equipment** for the Throne Room; **Educational programmes** for children, adults and families; **Portable audio guide**.

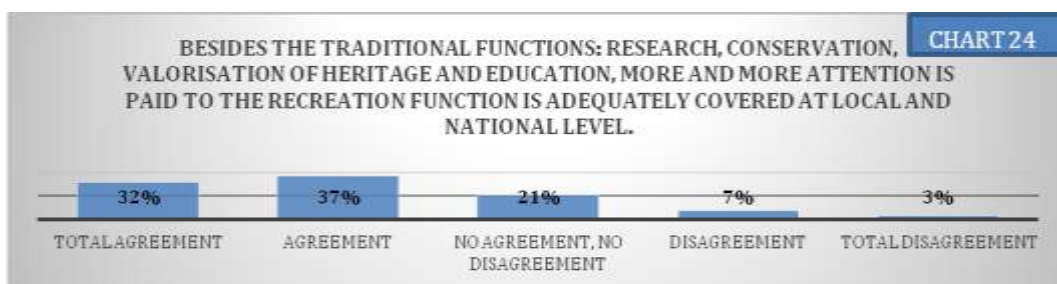


The most important category of stakeholders, regarding the exhibition, educational and recreational activity is represented by the visitors. Studying the visitors' behavior is an essential factor in adapting the museum's programmes and services, stated by 70% of the respondents. If we consider the cyclicity of such studies, most (88%) agree that they should be implemented annually. However, the main problem is the utility of these studies, because, most of the time, they are elaborated, implemented and evaluate by the museums' own personnel who do not have the professional skills for this. Implementing some serious studies, acquired from profile companies involve large costs which can exceed the budget for programmes, projects and activities for the entire year.

Media stakeholders are an important category and can be actively involved in media campaigns to promote the museums' activities. Although, the percentage regarding coverage is a positive one – 63%, it is worrying that 37% have partially or none of such partnerships.



In order to ensure a balance between the traditional functions of the museums, based on conserving and valuing the collection and society's new demands, there is an ongoing struggle. Recent studies (SANI, 2016) shows that visitors come to the museum to experience something new, to have a good time, but also for social and cultural reasons or just for recreational purposes. Actually, the recreational reason became one of the key objectives for the contemporary museum. For the daily stress which has an impact on society, recreational activities make a big difference, that feeling of value for the community life.



Tourism is a vital partner, but also a permanent challenge for adapting and innovating on a diverse competitive market. An important share of the Romanian tourism are foreign visitors. According to the National Institute of Statistics, in 2010 7.4 million foreigners entered Romania and in 2017 their number increased to 12.7 million. However, from 12,7 million, only 2.7 million foreigners quartered effectively, at least a night, which means only 21% from the total of tourists while the rest were just passing through our country. Even so, the number of foreign tourists increased with 70% from 2010 in 2017. Foreign tourists have a culture of visiting museums, probably being the first institutions in which they take interest when they reach a destination. According to the results from the questionnaire only 41% of respondents state that museums are concerned and assign funds to attract foreign visitors, 28% are indifferent and 21% do not have this concern, which means a negative score of 59% per total.



4. Conclusions

Most of the stakeholders are aware of their potential role in obtaining competitive advantages for the museum, in bringing more value for the community. Regarding their effective involvement as a solution, I think we should start with implementing decision-making committees in which the internal stakeholders (the employees of all sectors of a museum) will be involved in cultivating and educating on the importance of involving as many people as possible in management problems thus, stimulating the sense of belonging to different projects and responsibility towards the organization.

If public and mixed-funded museums have a share of at least 50% of positive answers to the perception of the benefits of external stakeholders, we have seen that only 30% of the private sector perceive positively, 37% are indifferent, 33% disagree. The partnerships with private entities are influenced especially by the museum's location and visibility. Thus, small museums or from rural areas incur difficulties in generating partnerships with persons or entities outside the museum. It is a big time consuming activity and it is impracticable for small museums which also have little personnel.

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